

Senator Bernie Sanders  
Prepared New Hampshire Remarks  
June 28, 2014

As a Vermont senator, I have – over the years – held hundreds of town meetings in almost every community in my state, so I am delighted to be with you here for a New Hampshire town meeting today and look forward to your questions and comments.

My message to you is pretty simple and straightforward. The United States of America – our great nation – faces more serious problems today than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s and, if we agree with the scientists about the severity of the crisis of climate change, the problems might be even more severe today. In addressing these problems, the simple truth is that the “same old, same old” is not going to work.

Establishment politics controlled by big-money interests is not going to work. Corporate-owned media, political gossip and five-second sound-bites are not going to work. The American people, including millions who have given up on the process and no longer vote, must become engaged in fighting for the future of this country. We need a political revolution in which the government works for ordinary people rather than the wealthy and their corporate lobbyists.

In terms of economics, let me tell you what’s happening. The great middle class of our country – once the envy of the entire world – is now disappearing. Real unemployment is close to 12 percent and millions of Americans are working longer hours for lower wages. Forty-six-and-a-half million Americans are now living in poverty, more than at any time in the history of our country. At 22 percent, the United States has – shamefully – the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on earth and, despite the modest success of the Affordable Care Act, many millions of Americans continue to have no health insurance while even more are

underinsured or pay heavy co-payments or deductibles on their insurance.

In Vermont, New Hampshire and states throughout the country people with jobs are flocking to emergency food shelves because their meager earnings are not enough to feed their families.

There are a lot of angry people out there – all across the country. Some are in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Some are in the Tea Party movement. But let me give you a hint as to why they are angry.

Despite a revolution in technology which enables the average worker to produce a lot more than in the past, the standard of living for working people continues to decline.

Since 1999, the typical middle-class family has seen its income go down by more than \$5,000 after adjusting for inflation.

That same typical middle-class American family earned less income last year than it did 25 years ago – back in 1989.

Typical male workers made \$283 less last year than they did 44 years ago.

Typical female workers earned \$1,775 less last year than they did in 2007.

And here's something that should get people very, very nervous: Half of all Americans have less than \$10,000 in their savings accounts and have no idea how they will ever be able to retire with dignity.

Over 5 and a half million young people today have either dropped out of high school or graduated high school and have no jobs. Too many of them turn to destructive or self-destructive behavior, which might explain why we have more people in jail in the United

States than any other country on earth.

Since 2001 we have lost over 60,000 factories in this country and millions of decent-paying manufacturing jobs. Corporations, as a result of disastrous trade policy, have been able to shut down plants in the United States, throw millions of workers out on the street and move to China, Vietnam or other low-wage countries. Not so many years ago, the largest private sector employer in the United States was General Motors, which paid unionized workers good wages and good benefits. Today – at a time when most of the new jobs being created are low-wage and part-time, the largest private-sector employer is Wal-Mart, which opposes unionization and pays low wages with minimal benefits.

Thirty years ago the United States led the world in terms of the percentage of our young people who graduated from college. Today, we are in about 12<sup>th</sup> place and hundreds of thousands of bright young people are unable to afford the outrageously high cost of higher education.

Perhaps most sadly, workers all over the country shake their heads and they worry not so much about themselves but what will happen to their kids. Will their kids – for the first time in modern American history – have a lower standard of living than they do? Will their kids have jobs that pay them a living wage? In fact, with real youth unemployment close to 20 percent, will their kids find any kind of job?

Now, the most important point to understand about the American economy today is that not all of our people are hurting. That's not what's happening.

The fact of the matter is that while tens of millions of American families are struggling to put bread on the table and are often one paycheck away from economic devastation, the wealthiest people in this country have never had it so good.

Today, the United State has – by far – the most unequal distribution of wealth and income of any major economy on earth, and that gap between the very, very rich and everybody else is growing wider, and wider and wider.

Today, the top 1 percent own 38 percent of the financial wealth of America. The bottom 60 percent own all of 2.3 percent.

Today, The Walton family – the owner of Wal-Mart and the wealthiest family in America – is now worth \$148 billion. My friends, that is more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of Americans.

Over the past decade, the net worth of the top 400 billionaires in this country has doubled – up by an astronomical \$1 trillion in just 10 years.

Charles and David Koch, the second wealthiest family in the country, saw a \$12 billion increase in its wealth since last year and are now worth \$80 billion. (And I'll have more to say about them and the friends they are entertaining on the other side of this city in a moment.)

Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, the eighth wealthiest person in the world, has a net worth of \$38 billion, up \$11.5 billion since last year.

In terms of income, as opposed to wealth, the last information that we have is from 2009-2012. During those years, 95 percent of all new income went to the top 1 percent.

In other words, while millions and millions of Americans saw a decline in their family income, while elderly people throughout this country are trying to live on Social Security checks of \$10,000 or \$12,000 a year, 95 percent of all new income went to the top 1 percent.

The top 1 percent now earns more income than the bottom 50 percent.

The top 25 hedge-fund managers made more than \$24 billion last year, enough to pay the full salaries of more than 425,000 public school teachers.

Today, corporate profits are at an all-time high, and CEOs earn about 270 times more than their average employees.

Each and every year, the wealthy and large corporations avoid paying anything close to their fair share of taxes. One out of four corporations pays nothing in federal income taxes and the wealthy and large corporations avoid paying \$100 billion a year in taxes because they stash their cash in the Cayman Islands and other offshore tax havens.

Over the past five years, profitable corporations like General Electric, Boeing, and Verizon paid nothing in federal income taxes, even though all of those companies made a combined profit of \$78 billion since 2008.

That's the reality of American economic life today.

Given the economic crisis that we face, what should we do we do about it? How do we restore hope to the American people and rebuild the middle class?

**JOBS:**For a start, let's all understand that real unemployment today (counting those who are under-employed or who have given up looking for work) is not 6.7 percent, it is 12.6 percent. That's a lot less than it was five years ago when George Bush left office. Youth unemployment is close to 20 percent, and African-American youth unemployment is almost double that.

If we are serious about rebuilding the middle class and putting millions of people back to work, we need a major federal jobs

program which includes significant investments in our crumbling infrastructure, in energy efficiency and sustainable energy, in early childhood education and in affordable housing. When we do that, we not only improve the quality of life in our country, we also create millions of decent-paying new jobs. We must also rewrite our unfettered trade policies, which have been an invitation for corporate America to shut down plants here and move to low-wage countries.

**WAGES:** If we are going to be serious about cutting poverty, we need – among other things – to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. We should pass legislation, which will soon be voted on in the Senate, to increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$10.10 an hour, but that is not enough: we must raise that minimum wage even higher in the coming years. We also need to expand our efforts at worker ownership. Employees will not be sending their jobs to China or Vietnam when they own the places in which they work. Further, we must address the pay equity issue. In 2014, women should not be earning 77-cents for every dollar a man makes.

**EDUCATION:** From child care and pre-school education, to elementary school, high school and college, we need major reform. It is beyond comprehension that working-class and middle-class families from one end of this country to another are unable to find quality, affordable child care. Every psychologist who has studied the issue agrees that the most formative years of a human beings' life are from zero to four. And yet we have millions of young children who are in inadequate child-care facilities with adults who lack the training and expertise to effectively nurture them. And it says a lot about our attitude toward young children when many of our child-care workers earn the minimum wage with minimal benefits.

And maybe we can learn something from countries like Finland, Denmark, Germany and other nations. They understand that it is

absurd to waste the intellectual capital of their nations. That is why they have systems in which young people are able to go to college, to medical school, to graduate school for free. They understand that in a competitive global economy, investing in your youth and having the best educated workforce on earth is essential for their country's future. Maybe we can learn something from them.

**RETIREMENT SECURITY:** At a time when only one-in-five workers in the private sector have a defined benefit pension plan; half of Americans have less than \$10,000 in savings; and two-thirds of seniors rely on Social Security for more than half of their income, we must protect and expand Social Security so that every American can retire with dignity. I am very proud to have helped form the Defending Social Security Caucus in the Senate. Several years ago, as you will recall, virtually every Republican, a number of Democrats and the president of the United States were calling for cuts in Social Security through a so-called chained Consumer Price Index. Well, we stopped them. Working with grassroots organizations and senior groups throughout the country, we rallied the American people and today very few politicians are now talking about cutting Social Security.

**CIVIL LIBERTIES:** After the horror of Sept. 11, 2001, when I was a member of the House, I voted against the USA Patriot Act. Not many members of Congress did. I voted against that legislation, not because I didn't believe that terrorism was a serious threat to this country or that our government must be extremely vigilante in protecting us from terrorist attacks. I voted against the USA Patriot Act, and years later the reauthorization of the USA Patriot Act, because I feared very much about government overreach into the privacy rights of the American people. Sadly, what I feared might happen has, in fact, happened.

In my view, the National Security Agency (NSA) and other intelligence agencies are out of control. We cannot talk about America as a "free country" when the government is collecting

information on virtually every phone call we make, when it is intercepting our emails and monitoring the websites we visit. That is not what a free society is about. Clearly, we need to protect this nation from terrorism, but we must do it in a way that does not undermine our constitutional rights.

**WAR AND PEACE:** With a large deficit and enormous unmet needs, it is absurd that the United States continues to spend almost as much on defense as the rest of the world combined. The U.S. must be a leader in the world in nuclear disarmament and efforts toward peace, not in the sale of weapons of destruction.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE:** While we have made progress in recent years in combatting discrimination and expanding the rights of minorities, women and gays, these advances are under constant attack from the right-wing. If the United States is to become the non-discriminatory society we want it to be, we must fight to protect the rights of all Americans. We must also pass strong and fair immigration legislation.

The unprecedented struggle that we're engaged in now against the Billionaire Class is not just about preserving Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, or whether we create the millions of jobs our economy desperately needs. It's not merely about whether we raise the minimum wage, make college affordable, protect women's rights or take the bold initiatives we need to reverse climate change and save our planet. It's not just about creating a health care system which guarantees health care to all as a right, or addressing the abysmally high rate of childhood poverty.

**WALL STREET:** During the financial crisis, huge Wall Street banks received more than \$700 billion in financial aid from the Treasury Department and more than \$16 trillion from the Federal Reserve because they were "too big to fail." Yet today, the largest banks in this country are much bigger than they were before



taxpayers bailed them out. The top six banks today have over \$9 trillion in assets, equivalent to almost 60 percent of the GDP of the United States. Further, they write half of the mortgages and two-thirds of the credit cards. From both a "too big to fail perspective" as well as the problems associated with Wall Street's dangerous economic power, it's time to break up these behemoths. The financial industry must serve and invest in our economy. It cannot simply be an island unto itself, generating huge profits through speculation and fraudulent financial transactions. And it's imperative that our judicial system vigorously pursue the crooks on Wall Street who have engaged in illegal activity.

**CLIMATE CHANGE:** The debate is over. The scientific community has been very clear: Global warming is real. It is caused by human activity. It is already causing massive problems. And, if we don't significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the planet we leave to our kids and grandchildren will be less and less habitable. The United States must lead the world in undertaking a massive effort to transform our energy system by moving away from fossil fuels to energy efficiency and sustainable energy. When we do that, we not only begin the process of reversing climate change, but we create millions of new jobs.

I have ticked off a number of very important issues, but let me suggest to you that the struggle that we are engaged in right now is much more than sum of all of these parts. The real struggle is whether we can prevent this country from moving to an oligarchic form of society in which virtually all economic and political power rests with a handful of billionaires.

In my view, there are now three major political forces in this country: The Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the Koch brothers-led Billionaire Party. As a result of the disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court ruling which regards corporations as people and allows the super-rich to spend as much as they want on elections, the Billionaire Party (aligned with the Republicans) is

now the major political force in the country.

Let me give you a couple examples of what I mean by that.

The Koch brothers, worth \$80 billion dollars, are the second wealthiest family in America. Working with other billionaires like Sheldon Adelson, the Kochs are prepared to spend an unlimited sum of money to create an America shaped by their right-wing views. And I mean unlimited. Last year, according to Forbes magazine, the Koch brothers' fortune *increased* by \$12 billion dollars, while the fortune of Sheldon Adelson *increased* by \$11 billion. In one year! In other words, a handful of self-serving right-wing multi-billionaires have the capability to spend more money than Barack Obama and Mitt Romney spent in their presidential campaigns – combined – and it will hardly dent the increases in their wealth in just one year.

What does this mean in the real world? It means that several weeks ago, prospective Republican candidates for president trotted out to Las Vegas to explain to Sheldon Adelson what they could do for him and why they could be the kind of president he would like. You probably thought that New Hampshire holds the first primary in the nation. Not anymore. After the Adelson Primary, the winner could be the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars for his campaign. In the New Hampshire primary, ordinary people – Democrats and Republicans – come out to vote for a candidate. That's important. But not as important as the Adelson Primary which gives them the financial resources they need to buy the votes they need in other states.

And then there are the Koch brothers who, as we speak, are paying for a little party across town – the so-called Freedom Summit. As you know, during the last campaign they spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to defeat President Obama and elect right-wing candidates. It is quite likely that in the coming years they will spend even more.

Now here is something interesting and rather extraordinary about the Koch brothers. In the year 1980, David Koch ran as the Libertarian Party's vice-presidential candidate and helped to fund that party's efforts. Needless to say, he thought that Ronald Reagan – the winner of that election – was way too liberal.

On Election Day, David Koch's Libertarian Party was soundly rejected and received 1 percent of the vote. Back then, their ideas were considered extreme. Today – 34 years and billions of dollars later – those same ideas are considered mainstream in today's right-wing Republican Party.

Listen carefully as I excerpt some of the planks in the 1980 Libertarian Party platform. Tell me if they sound familiar.

Here's one, and I quote: “We urge **the repeal of federal campaign finance laws**, and the immediate abolition of the despotic Federal Election Commission.” End of quote.

After the disastrous Citizens United decision of 2010 and the equally bad McCutcheon decision last month, the Republican Party is moving forward to do exactly what Clarence Thomas proposed in his opinion in the McCutcheon case and what the Koch brothers espoused 34 years ago. That is, they intend to get the Supreme Court to, in fact, end all campaign finance restrictions. That will mean that billionaires like the Koch brothers and Adelson can contribute unlimited sums of money to every candidate they support. Their understanding of democracy – then and now – is that billionaires should be able to buy elections. That's why, among many other things, we need to overturn Citizens United and pass public funding of elections.

And here's another plank from the 1980 Libertarian Party platform. And I quote: “We favor the abolition of Medicare and Medicaid programs.”

Well, read the Ryan budget that the House just passed on Thursday. Ryan and the House Republicans would end Medicare as we know it and move toward a voucher program in which seniors will be given a check to go out and buy private insurance. In terms of Medicaid, the Ryan budget does not end that program, but it would take health insurance away from 40 million Americans over a 10-year period by cutting Medicaid by more than \$1.5 trillion. It also would repeal the Affordable Care Act.

The Koch platform in 1980 also said this: “We favor the repeal of the fraudulent, virtually bankrupt, and increasingly oppressive Social Security system. Pending that repeal, participation in Social Security should be made voluntary.”

Does that sound familiar? Republicans came close under Bush to moving toward private accounts and virtually every single Republican is on record in favor of “entitlement cuts,” which means cuts in Social Security.

In 1980, the Koch brothers Libertarian Party platform stated: “We oppose all personal and corporate income taxation, including capital gains taxes ... We support the eventual repeal of all taxation. As an interim measure, all criminal and civil sanctions against tax evasion should be terminated immediately.”

Well, I can’t say that today’s Republicans want to eliminate all taxation. That wouldn’t be true. But the recently-passed Ryan budget provides a \$5-trillion tax break for the wealthiest people in this country and large corporations. The Ryan budget would provide an average tax break of at least \$200,000 a year for the average millionaire.

And lastly, the Libertarian Party staked out a clear position on the minimum wage. Here’s what it said: “We support repeal of all law which impede the ability of any person to find employment, such as **minimum wage** laws.”

In English, what that means is not only opposition to raising the minimum wage, it means eliminating the concept of the minimum wage so that in high unemployment areas Americans could be forced to work for \$3 or \$4 an hour.

In other words, the agenda of the Koch brothers is not only to defund Obamacare. The agenda of the Koch brothers is to repeal virtually every major piece of legislation that has been signed into law over the past 80 years that has protected the middle class, the elderly, the children, the sick and the most vulnerable in this country.

And that, my friends, is where we are today. Not content with a situation in which the United States has an increasingly obscene level of income and wealth inequality, the Billionaire Party is accelerating their war against the middle class and working families.

They want it all. More tax breaks for billionaires and large corporations. More cuts in every single program that is important to the average American.

And let me conclude by saying this. The struggle we are engaged in right now is not just to preserve Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid and all of the programs that protect working families, the sick and the vulnerable. The struggle that we are engaged in now is not just to protect the environment and our planet from the ravages of pollution and global warming.

The extraordinary fight that we are waging at this moment is in fact whether the United States moves toward an oligarchic form of society in which our economic and political lives are controlled by the Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson and other billionaires or whether we can rebuild the American middle class, provide a decent life for all of our people and have a democracy which rests upon the principle of one-person, one-vote.

